

“Bridging the Gap: Democracy and Dialogue in Cyberspace”

Origin of Concept

Since we found there is little flexibility during the course of the year to invest significant time to current events and controversial topics due to the rigidity of the AP US History curriculum, we wanted to provide a vehicle by which students from Lower Merion and Spokane could discuss current events. Additionally, Lower Merion is predominantly liberal and Spokane largely conservative, so with diametric political views, we believed an on-line forum would be the perfect place to extend learning beyond the classroom. At minimum, we wanted students to discuss current events in a historical context.

Development of Forum

We found a student from each school who had the technological prowess to develop an on-line forum. Working together, they created a site that included our parameters but was also designed so students could feel as though the forum was uniquely their own. We initially offered extra credit to students who went to the forum and responded to our prompts, however, we soon found that they were discussing important social issues as well as their favorite books and movies. Students posted almost every night, and what began as an extra credit assignment morphed into an impactful experience for all involved.

Contents

Included, you will find a word document that explains how to establish your own forum. Additionally, there are pdf files that display teacher prompts as well as off topic threads and a debate on gay marriage. The last two items are entirely the students' creation.

Thank You

We would like to extend our sincere gratitude to Zack Brown of Spokane and Tim Gowa of Lower Merion for designing the forum as well as the pdf files and how to guide included in this presentation. Your assistance has been invaluable. Thank you.

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